Tornado Outbreak of September 20, 2018

26 tornadoes, 0 serious injuries or fatalities

On the evening of Thursday, September 20 2018, a line of storms raced across southern Minnesota into west central Wisconsin and produced widespread severe weather. Thousands of trees were snapped, miles of powerlines were down, and hundreds of buildings were damaged. This storm system produced 26 tornadoes, two of which were EF2 with winds speeds of over 110 mph. Some homes were completely destroyed in Morristown, Minnesota. This event was incredible in the sense that the storms were moving at 60 to 70 mph, which meant people had less time to seek shelter. What’s even more incredible is that there were no serious injuries or fatalities from the storms. This event proved the effectiveness of using Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to broadcast tornado warnings. Several people that we talked to received the warning on their phone, and went inside to take shelter just before the tornado hit.

Figure 1: Tornado and wind damage from the severe storms of September 20, 2019. Amazingly there were no serious injuries or fatalities despite the widespread damage across southern Minnesota into west central Wisconsin.
Flooding and Flood Safety
The Upper Midwest will be vulnerable to flooding this spring and summer

The cool and wet weather last fall left the ground wetter than normal. Arctic cold followed by the snowiest February on record led to widespread flooding this spring from the snowmelt. Fortunately, we had a dry spell for the second half of March into the first part of April, but that doesn’t mean our flooding threat is over.

You may recall 2014 which was similar in terms of heavy snow, and a relatively dry spring. Once June rolled around, heavy rains led to major flooding across the region. We are not predicting a repeat of 2014 for this year, but we do want to use that year as an example that flooding can develop quickly if we have a wet pattern set up across the region. Flood safety starts with avoiding flood waters. Over half of all flood-related fatalities occur in automobiles when people drive into flood waters. Flooding at night is especially dangerous because it is difficult to see if the road is washed out. When it comes to flooding and driving our message is simple. TURN AROUND, DON’T DROWN.

Figure 2: Flood safety infographic stressing the importance of vehicle safety when roads are flooded.